

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-10

INFO OCT-01 AF-08 EUR-12 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-04 H-01
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USIA-06 EB-07 OMB-01 TRSE-00 ACDA-07 SSM-03 IO-13
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R 301429Z DEC 76
FM AMEMBASSY CAIRO
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 137
INFO AMEMBASSY ABU DHABI
AMCONSUL ALEXANDRIA
AMEMBASSY JIDDA
AMEMBASSY KHARTOUM
AMEMBASSY KUWAIT
AMEMBASSY MOSCOW
AMCONSUL PORT SAID UNN
AMEMBASSY TRIPOLI

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E.O. 11652: N/A
TAGS: PFOR PINT EG
SUBJECT: PEOPLE'S ASSEMBLY DEBATE: POLITICAL ASPECTS OF OPPOSITION
CRITICISM

REF: CAIRO 17785 (NOTAL)

SUMMARY. IN PAST FEW DAYS OF SHARP DEBATE OVER POLICY STATEMENT
OF NEW EGYPTIAN GOVERNMENT, PARLIAMENTARY OPPOSITION HAS STRIVEN
TO ESTABLISH BEYOND QUESTION ITS RIGHT TO BE FULLY INFORMED ON
GOE POLICY AND TO CRITICIZE IT AS IT SEES FIT. NOISIEST ATTACKS
CAME FROM OFFICIAL LEADER OF OPPOSITION, RIGHT WINGER MUSTAFA
KAMIL MURAD WHILE INFLUENTIAL SOCIALIST HILMY MURAD SPOKE FOR
INDEPENDENT GROUPING. BOTH WERE TESTING LIMITS GOE MAY
ENVISION TO PARLIAMENTARY OPPOSITION AND JOCKEYING
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FOR POSITION IN PEOPLE'S ASSEMBLY IN FUTURE, PRESS, WHICH
DEVOTED MAJOR COVERAGE TO PROCEEDINGS, FOR MOST PART SAW
UNPRECEDENTLY HEATED AND OPEN DEBATES AS POSITIVE INDICATION
FOR FUTURE OF DEMOCRACY IN EGYPT. SADAT HIMSELF, WHOSE POLITICAL
LIBERALIZATION HAS CREATED PRESENT SITUATION SEEMS INCLINED
TO ALLOW OPPOSITION LOOSE REIN. DECEMBER 29, ASSEMBLY VOTED

APPROVAL OF GOE STATEMENT BY LARGE MARGIN, PARTIES OF LEFT AND RIGHT REJECTING AND INDEPENDENTS ABSTAINING. END SUMMARY.

1. PAST FEW DAYS HAVE SEEN CONTINUING SHARP PEOPLE'S ASSEMBLY DEBATE OVER GOE POLICY STATEMENT AND OPPOSITION SNIPING AT GOE WHICH CAUSING QUITE A STIR IN PRESS. MOST EXCHANGES AND STRONG WORDS HAVE FOCUSED ON MANAGEMENT OF ECONOMY, HOUSING, AGRICULTURE AND COMMODITY PRICES, BUT CERTAIN POLITICAL ISSUES HAVE ALSO BEEN RAISED, SOMETIMES OBLIQUELY.

2. ROLE OF OPPOSITION: BOTH OFFICIAL AND INDEPENDENT OPPOSITION'S WIDE-RANGING ATTACKS SEEM DESIGNED MORE TO ESTABLISH STRONG PRECEDENT OF RIGHT TO BE FULLY INFORMED ON AND TO CRITICIZE ANY ASPECTS OF GOE POLICY THAN SUBSTANTIALLY TO INFLUENCE PRESENT POLICY. INDEPENDENT SOCIALIST LEADER HILMY MURAD MADE THIS SPECIFIC IN DECEMBER 28 WARNING THAT OPPOSITION WOULD COOPERATE WITH GOE IN SOLVING PROBLEMS AT HAND, BUT INTENDED TO MAKE ITS VIEWS KNOWN ON "POLICIES WHICH WE KNOW DO NOT SOLVE THE PEOPLE'S PROBLEMS." DAY BEFORE, OFFICIAL OPPOSITION HEAD MUSTAFA KAMIL MURAD (HAND PICKED BY GOE) HAD BEEN PARTICULARLY ROUGH ON SALIM GOVERNMENT OVER ISSUE OF MILITARY ORDER ON HOUSING DECREED BY SALIM IN NOVEMBER TO CONTROL LANDLORD-TENANT RELATIONSHIP. ACCORDING TO PRESS REPORTS, MUSTAFA KAMIL ACCUSED SALIM OF DESIRING TO BE DICTATOR (INTERESTING TO NOTE, IN ALL THIS, THAT SADAT SPARED ANY HINT OF CRITICISM) AND USURPING POWERS, AND REFERRED BITTERLY TO SALIM'S "GOVERNMENT OF SHIPSHOD ACTION IN RUNNING AFFAIRS OF THE KINGDOM (I.E. SALIM'S KINGDOM OF EGYPT.) TEMPER FLARED WHILE SPEAKER MAR'I SOUGHT TO CALM ALL INVOLVED, AND MUSTAFA KAMIL SHREDDED HIS PAPERS IN ANGER AND STALKED OUT OF ASSEMBLY. ON DECEMBER 28, HOWEVER, HE PULLED OFF LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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COUP DE THEATRE, UPSTAGING HILMY MURAD, WHEN HE WAS TWICE PREVENTED IN ASSEMBLY FROM OFFERING HIS RESIGNATION AS DEPUTY, MET PRIVATELY WITH MAR'I FOR LONG DISCUSSION AND WAS OBSERVED LEAVING PREMISES "WITH BIG SMILE ON HIS FACE."

3. PRESS HAD FIELD DAY REPORTING SCANDAL AND CLUCKING OF CENTER PARTY TONGUES THAT ATTENDED THIS EPISODE, BUT ONLY AHRAH CAME DOWN HARD FOR OBSERVATION OF "PROPRIETIES." AFTER INITIAL HESITATION, AKHBAR SAW IN VIOLENT ASSEMBLY DEBATES A "ROAD TO DEMOCRACY...NOT EXPERIENCED HERE FOR TWENTY-FIVE YEARS." PAPER COMMENTED THAT ASSEMBLY MEMBERS, UNACCUSTOMED TO CHALLENGING GOVERNMENT, HAD NEVER STRONGLY QUESTIONED MINISTERS OR DECLARED LACK OF CONFIDENCE IN GOVERNMENTS IN PAST. GUMHURIYYA CALLED EVENTS OF PAST FEW DAYS "SIGN OF HEALTH BY ANY STANDARD...SOUND RULES OF DEMOCRATIC PRACTICE WILL SEND ROOTS DEEP INTO GROUND."

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4. PRESS FREEDOMS: HILMY MURAD ALSO CHALLENGED FIRM GOE POLICY, ENSHRINED IN LAW, THAT ASU MUST BE SOLE OWNER OF PRESS. IN FLOOR DEBATE, HE CALLED FOR RECONSIDERATION OF THIS POLICY, ASKED FOR NEW LEGISLATION GUARANTEEING FREEDOM OF PRESS AND DECLARED THAT ALL POLITICAL PARTIES SHOULD BE FREE TO PUBLISH THEIR OWN NEWSPAPERS. THIS WAS REMINDER TO GOE THAT, DESPITE COMPARATIVE LIBERALITY OF ITS PRESENT APPROACH TO PRESS FREEDOMS, MUCH OF OPPOSITION HAS BEEN ALLOWED ONLY LIMITED ACCESS TO PRESS. (MININF REPLIED THAT NEW LAW IN WORKS, WITHOUT SPECIFYING WHAT CHANGES GOE HAS IN MIND.)

5. FOREIGN POLICY: POLITICAL SPECTRUM HAS MAINTAINED SOLIDARITY WITH GOVERNMENT ON FOREIGN POLICY AND SUBJECT HAS NOT BEEN
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ADDRESSED IN DETAIL EITHER IN PAST ASSEMBLY SPEECHES OR PRESENT

DEBATES. OPPOSITION SEEMS TO BE GOING ALONG WITH PA TRADITIONAL DEFERENCE TO PRESIDENCY ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS, ALTHOUGH THIS MAY BE CHANGING. FAHMY EXPECTED TO REPLY TO QUESTIONS JAN 1. IN THIS AREA, AS IN OTHERS, OPPOSITION IS IN PROCESS OF TESTING LATTITUDE GOE IS LIKELY TO ALLOW IT, BUT FOREIGN POLICY, AND MIDDLE EAST IN PARTICULAR, WOULD NOT BE WELL SELECTED GROUND TO DO BATTLE.

6. RELATIONS TO ARABS AND SOVIETS DID COME UP, HOWEVER. HILMY MURAD COMPLAINED THAT EGYPT UNFAIRLY SHOULDERING FINANCIAL BURDEN OF MILITARY ESTABLISHMENT WHICH SERVES DEFENCE OF ALL ARAB STATES AND OIL PRODUCERS IN PARTICULAR. IN HIS VIEW, ARAB COUNTRIES SHOULD FINANCE WAR BUDGETS OF CONFRONTATION STATES AND THEIR CONTRIBUTIONS "SHOULD NOT BE CONFINED TO AIRPLANES ALONE." INDEPENDENT (COMMUNIST) AHMAD TAHA ALSO SMOTE ARABS, CLAIMING "IT IS A LIE TO SAY THAT ARABS ARE HELPING EGYPT." EGYPT IN FACT "GIVING THEM ASSISTANCE WITH MANPOWER AND TECHNICAL EXPERTISE WORTH L.E. 1.5 BILLION ANNUALLY." (THIS IS EGYPT, SO FIGURE NEEDED NO DOCUMENTATION.) THIS LINE OF REASONING NOT UNCONGENIAL TO LINE SADAT HAS HIMSELF TAKEN. IT ACTUALLY SERVES GOE INTERESTS AND GOE NOT LIKELY TO ENGAGE IN ENERGETIC REBUTTAL UNTIL AND UNLESS ARAB DONORS SHOW SIGNS OF RESENTMENT.

7. TAHA WENT ON TO DEMAND THAT GOVERNMENT DEFINE WHO ARE EGYPT'S FRIENDS AND WHO ARE HER ENEMIES, IMPLICATION BEING THAT GOE-SOVIET POLICY WRONGHEADED. CENTER PARTY NOTABLE ELWI HAFEZ, ON OTHER HAND, CHIDED SOVIETS FOR HARD LINE APPROACH TOWARDS EGYPTIAN DEBT AND FOR SADDLING EGYPT WITH INDUSTRIAL PLANT THAT EITHER OBSOLETE OR VASTLY OVERPRICE.

8. NIL NISI BONUM: OSTENSIBLE DEFENDER OF GOE AND CENTER PARTY HAFEZ THEN PULLED SWITCHEROO, EMBARRASSING GOE BY DEMANDING END TO SPECIAL FINANCIAL ALLOCATIONS ASSIGNED TO NASSER FAMILY AND CRITICISING NASSER HIMSELF IN HARSH TERMS. HE THEN ASKED THAT FORMER MININDUSTRY AND PRIMIN (UNDER SADAT) SIDKY BE PROSECUTED LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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FOR HIS ABUSE OF OFFICE. SHOCKED, GOE AND CENTER PARTY, MAR'I LEADING THE WAY, DISASSOCIATED THEMSELVES FROM HAFEZ'S REMARKS. NAR'I EULOGIZED NASSER AND ASSEMBLY AGREED TO END SACRILIGIOUS DISCUSSION OF ALLOCATIONS.

9. PATTERN OF BEHAVIOR IN ASSEMBLY IS PRESENTLY RUNNING COUNTER TO EXPECTATION THAT MUSTAFA KAMIL MURAD WOULD BE TAME OPPOSITION SPOKESMAN AND THAT HILMY MURAD WOULD BECOME CHIEF GOVERNMENT GADFLY. HILMY, IN FACT, TAKING LOW KEY, REASONED APPROACH AND THUS FAR AVOIDING CLASH WITH SALIM AND GOE. IT ALWAYS POSSIBLE THAT MUSTAFA KAMIL'S BRAVURA PERFORMANCE ON ASSEMBLY FLOOR NO MORE THAN ARTFUL DODGE SPONSORED BY GOE AND INTENDED TO SERVE ITS ORIGINAL SCHEME TO TAKE WIND FROM INDEPENDENTS'

SAILS BY GIVING MUSTAFA KAMIL, HEAD OF SANCTIONED PARTY, NOD AS LEADER OF OFFICIAL OPPOSITION. MORE LIKELY, HOWEVER, IS POSSIBILITY THAT MUSTAFA KAMIL, ECONOMIC CONSERVATIVE, KNOWS HE WILL NOT BE ABLE TO INFLUENCE GOE ON ECONOMICS UNLESS HE CAN MUSTER SUPPORT FROM BOTH CENTER AND INDEPENDENTS ON OTHER ISSUES AND UNLESS HE CAN PREVENT INFLUENTIAL INDEPENDENTS LIKE HILMY MURAD FROM RELEGATING HIM TO OBSCURITY.

10. SOMEWHAT ANTI-CLIMATICALLY, ASSEMBLY VOTED OVERWHELMINGLY APPROVAL OF POLICY STATEMENT DECEMBER 29, ALL MEMBERS OF PARTIES OF LEFT (2) AND RIGHT (5) OPPOSING AND 22 INDEPENDENT ABSTAINING. IN SPEEC TO ASSEMBLY, SALIM NOTED DIFFERENCE IN VIEWS BETWEEN CENTER PARTY AND OPPOSITION AND RENEWED GOE WILLINGNESS TO LISTEN TO ANY ASSEMBLY MEMBER, BUT REMINDED THAT CENTER PARTY MAJORITY, FREELY ELECTED, INTENDED TO RULE.

11. MOST IMPORTANT FACTOR IN VIABILITY OF OPPOSITION AS A WHOLE, HOWEVER, COMES DOWN TO WHAT EFFECT ITS CRITICISM WILL HAVE ON SADAT'S INTERNAL POSITION. HE HAS ALREADY DETERMINED STANDARDS HE EXPECTS THEM TO ADHERE TO, SUCH AS DOCUMENTING ACCUSATIONS AGAINST GOVERNMENT PERSONNEL, STICKING TO "CONSTRUCTIVE CRITICISM" AND RESISTING TEMPTATION TO EXPLOIT EGYPT'S ECONOMIC WOES. WE BELIEVE HE IS INCLINED TO ALLOW OPPOSITION, LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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EXCEPT "COMMUNISTS", CONSIDERABLE LATTITUDE. PRESENT SITUATION RESULT OF HIS POLITICAL OPEN DOOR, BUT HE MAY NOW FIND IT DIFFICULT TO CLOSE IF HE WISHES TO CURB OPPOSITION IN FUTURE. IT IS REGRETTABLE THAT ECONOMIC OPEN DOOR HAS NOT MET WITH SAME ENTHUSIASM.
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